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# **“We Are All Hizbullah Now”: Narrating the Party of God<sup>1</sup>**

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In a January 2007 interview he gave to the *Independent* newspaper after a period living in Uruguay, the novelist Martin Amis was asked: “What is the most depressing thing about Britain you have observed since your return?” He replied: “It was the sight of middle-class white demonstrators, last August [protesting against Israel’s July 2006 bombardment of Lebanon] waddling around under placards saying, We Are All Hizbullah Now”. To Amis’ sceptical gaze, such affluent Western liberal apologists for Hizbullah had no understanding of the true malevolent nature of the self-styled Lebanese ‘Party of God’:

Well, make the most of being Hizbullah while you can. As its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, famously advised the West: “We don't want anything from you. We just want to eliminate you”.

Yet, Amis’ powerful condemnation of western ignorance about the true nature of Hizbullah was itself somewhat ignorant, because – unfortunately – no one has been able to find any record of Nasrallah ever uttering such a ‘famous’ threat against the West.<sup>2</sup> If Amis’ observations testify to the sheer poverty of most Western public discourse about Hizbullah – an impoverishment which extends from the left to the right, from high political theory to low journalism – they do, however, contain one small grain of truth: a group of protestors did indeed march through London under the provocative banner “We Are All Hizbullah

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I use the common spelling of Arabic names and phrases that are most familiar to English-speaking readers. For all other terms, I use a simplified version of the transliteration system used by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES). Finally, I omit all diacritical marks, except for the ayn (‘) and hamza (‘) and I also omit all case-endings.

<sup>2</sup> To be sure, Amis provides no source for this quotation, but it seems that it derives from an essay by the right wing American commentator Mark Steyn, in which the words are attributed to Hizbullah spokesman Husayn Mussawi, not Nasrallah. Perhaps Amis is confusing Husayn Mussawi with Nasrallah’s predecessor as Hizbullah leader, ‘Abbass Mussawi, who was assassinated in 1992. In any case, the context of Steyn’s (stridently anti-Hizbullah) article reveals that the ‘you’ to whom Mussawi is referring are clearly Israeli Zionists, not the West at large: Mussawi is simply re-stating Hizbullah’s long-standing opposition to the Zionist state, not announcing Jihad against the world in general (Amis, 2007).

Now". This particular slogan has retained a certain popular currency in literary, journalistic and political discourse in the intervening years, where it is cited and re-cited both positively and negatively, sincerely and ironically, in a spirit of genuine political solidarity and as damning proof of the naivety of the liberal intelligentsia. If the name 'Hizbullah' once referred to one comparatively small regional political and military actor in a country far away, in other words, it is now clear that it has become an increasingly exportable, global signifier of 'resistance' (whatever we take that term to mean) more generally. For most observers, whether sympathetic or critical, the story of Hizbullah is the story of a party which has attained its current power and influence not simply by being the voice of its original Shi'i Muslim supporters – or its Iranian and Syrian patrons – but by successfully speaking to a much wider regional and global constituency: to Lebanese nationalism, to pan-Arab nationalism, even to Third World or Leftist socialism or revolutionary communism. What if Amis' worst fears are correct and, for better or worse, we really are "all Hizbullah now"?

To be sure, Hizbullah has been the subject of many studies in its 30-year existence that examine everything from its religious and political ideology (Saad-Ghorayeb 2001; Harik 2004; Alagha 2006; Norton 2009); its social and political rituals, community organisation and social welfare movements (Deeb 2006) to its media and communications strategy (Harb 2011). It is my aim in this essay to focus on a new – and as yet entirely unexamined – dimension in the party's communication strategy: literature. As we will see, the last few years have witnessed an explosion of fictional and non-fiction narratives by writers who are affiliated to/and or support Hizbullah which have never been discussed before in the Anglophone world. They range from autobiographical memoirs and testimonials by Hizbullah resistance fighters, through prison narratives of female resistance figures, to novels and short stories. If such Hizbullah narratives have one thing in common – and which distinguishes them from allegedly more 'objective' works of political science – it is that they all claim to represent the Party of God from the inside out: they seek to depict the subjective experience of what it means and feels like to be a Hizbullah supporter, member, even a fighter. This body of literature is of uneven literary merit and a lot of it could easily be considered propaganda (though of course it is no less interesting for that) but,

nonetheless, it does constitute a unique forum in which Hizbullah is able to speak about itself, to itself and to others. In this respect, Hizbullah narratives offer a fascinating – and as yet unrecognised – insight into the self-understanding of this most opaque and secretive of resistance movements.

This article is a set of notes towards a larger cultural history of Hizbullah (written in collaboration with Arthur Bradley) from its inception in 1982 to the present day.<sup>3</sup> Its aim is not to advance a particular thesis or argument about these narratives but merely to offer a general and provisional overview or typology of key themes and questions. My aim is to simply map what is still largely uncharted literary territory before we can begin to assess or evaluate it in more detail. Accordingly, what follows is in four – distinct but overlapping – parts. Firstly, the article will examine Hizbullah's position in the particular context of Lebanese literary production, publication and dissemination. Secondly, it will examine the ways in which Hizbullah narratives consistently mobilise the place of the Karbala tragedy within Shi'i theology as a means of authenticating its political resistance to Israel. Thirdly, the article will address the controversial question of Hizbullah literature's attitude towards Judaism and, in particular, the long-standing charge that it is anti-Semitic rather than simply anti-Zionist. Finally, and to go back to where we started, the article will discuss how narratives of the Party of God also seek to move beyond their specific Shi'i constituency to speak to, and on behalf of, a Lebanese, Pan-Arab and even global audience. In what follows, then, I will consider the following questions: What do Hizbullah narratives tell us about the voice, identity and subjectivity of the Party of God? How do Hizbullah supporters represent themselves to themselves and to others in narrative form? To what extent do Hizbullah narratives tell the story of the movement from its origins in the Shi'i community to its current dominant position in a world where a surprisingly large number of people (Christian, Muslim, secular, liberal and leftist) are happy to proclaim that "we are all Hizbullah now"?

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<sup>3</sup> This project will examine the (self-)representation of Hizbullah in literature, film, media and culture more widely (television dramas, video games, the Party's own Resistance theme park Mleeta).

### Hizbullah in Lebanese Literature<sup>4</sup>

Firstly, I want to examine the place of Hizbullah literature within the context of the Lebanese literary scene more widely. It is important to begin by noting that even the most cursory study of Lebanese literature produced during and after the Civil War reveals the almost total absence of any reference to the Party of God whether positive or negative: Hizbullah is simply not represented in the work of mainstream Lebanese writers. As such, Hizbullah stands in marked contrast to other resistance movements such as the Palestinian Resistance in Lebanon, the Lebanese National Movement and the Lebanese National Resistance Front, all of which find textual representation in a number of Lebanese war and post-war narratives. However, in his study of the representation of the Resistance in the twentieth century Arabic novel, Ibrahim Fadlallah (2009) identifies a few novels that attempt to explore the overlap between the discourse of secular resistance movements in Lebanon during the war and the ideology of Islamic parties such as Hizbullah. In 'Awad Sha'aban's *Darb al-Janoub* [The Route of the South] (1988) and 'Abdel Majeed Zaraket's *al-Hijra fi Layl al-Raheel* [Displacement in a Night of Departure] (1996), for example, there is a clear continuity between secular and Islamic ideas of resistance, beginning, of course, with the fact that both are struggling against the same opponent: the Israeli occupiers (Fadlallah 2009, pp. 94-164; pp. 165-193).

Despite the attempt of these novels to shed light on the ideology of Islamic resistance fighters and to link it with that of secular parties, the fact remains that they are exceptions to the general rule: Hizbullah remains conspicuous by its absence from the Lebanese novel. It is also important to clarify here that the absence of any direct narrative representation of Hizbullah was not confined to secular writers either: Fadlallah notes that "for a long time, the Islamic Resistance itself failed to provide a proper narrative platform" that would shed light on the Party's experiences and that would transmit its worldview (2009, p. 229). In some ways, the relative absence of prose depictions of the Party of God during its earlier years remains barely explicable: this state of affairs stands in sharp contrast to Hizbullah's prolific output in the genre of

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<sup>4</sup> All translations from Arabic are my own.

poetry, for example, which was used from the start to transmit the subjectivities and consciousness of its members and supporters.<sup>5</sup>

As already noted, though, the last few years have witnessed a significant growth in narratives about Hizbullah, both from outside and (more commonly) from inside the movement itself. It remains the case that Hizbullah narratives are relatively small in number, especially when compared to the substantial body of literary works (whether autobiography, prose fiction or poetry) by and about other Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. However, this comparison does not tell the whole story: Hizbullah is historically much younger than the Brotherhood and (unlike the latter) its leadership had no connections to secular literary or intellectual circles.<sup>6</sup> If Hizbullah's literary roots are clearly not as deep or long-standing as those of the Muslim Brotherhood, it could be argued that this makes the recent explosion in prose narratives (novels, stories, memoirs and autobiographies) emerging from the Party all the more remarkable a phenomenon. In total, I would estimate that there are currently around 100 titles that could be placed under the category of 'Hizbullah narratives' – but more than 50 of these have appeared in the last 2 years alone.

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<sup>5</sup> See Khalil 'Ajami (2001), Hamada Ihab (2003), 'Abd al-Mahdi Fadlallah (2004) and Jawad Hassan Nasrallah (2007) for examples of contemporary Hizbullah poetry. It is important to note that poetry has played a key role in the construction of Hizbullah's public identity: many Hizbullah slogans at public rallies and demonstrations were originally derived from poems about the movement. Poetry was also incorporated into the Party's attempt to produce what Joseph Alagha describes as "purposeful music" (2013) – political songs and video clips – to accompany public rallies and events. In this sense, Hizbullah poetry still plays a small but not insignificant role in the Party's extremely sophisticated and wide-ranging media strategy that stretches from public demonstrations through its dedicated radio channel *al-Noor* (The Light) and television channel *al-Manar* (The Lighthouse) to the internet.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to recall here that many of the founding members and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood were connected to literary circles or were writers themselves. To single out a few examples, Sayyid Qutb – one of the leading intellectual figures of the Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s – was himself a novelist and poet with several literary works to his name. Prior to his involvement with the Brotherhood, Qutb was also closely connected to important literary circles in Egypt: he is credited with launching the literary career of the Egyptian Nobel Prize Laureate Naguib Mahfouz. Qutb's brother, Muhammad, and his two sisters, Amina and Hamida, were also writers and literary scholars as well as being closely affiliated to the Brotherhood. Similarly, Zainab al-Ghazali – a major Egyptian female Islamist who played a key role in re-organising the Brotherhood in the 1960s following the death of its founder Hassan al-Banna – is a well-known writer whose memoir *Ayyam Min Hayati* (1972) has been translated into English as *Return of the Pharaoh: Memoir in Nasir's Prison* (1974) and has been the subject of numerous scholarly works. Finally, 'Umar al-Tilmissani, the third General Guide of the Brotherhood, who was head of the organisation from 1972 to 1986, also published an autobiography entitled *Zikrayat la Muzakirat* [Memories Not Memoirs] (1985). In this sense, literature (whether autobiography, prose fiction or poetry) has always been one of the means through which the Brotherhood has expressed itself. This level of literary production cannot be found in any other Islamist movement whether it be Hamas or Hizbullah.

To appreciate the full complexity of this publishing phenomenon, we need to place Hizbullah narratives within the context of their publication and distribution. It will be no surprise to learn that the majority of the narratives in question are published by Shi'i publishing houses such as Dar al-Hadi, Dar al-Mahaja al-Bayda' and Dar al-Amir,<sup>7</sup> all located in Hizbullah's famous stronghold *al-Dhahiyya* – the southern suburb of Beirut. Such publications are exclusively found in bookstores in *al-Dhahiyya* and appear to address and cater to the party's core constituency of local Lebanese Shi'i supporters: none are available as e-books or translated into languages other than Arabic. Yet, interestingly, a few narratives have also found a publication outlet in secular publishing houses such as the renowned left-leaning Dar al-Adab and the Arab Scientific Publishers. Perhaps the most obvious explanation for this 'politics of publication' could be the identity and status of the authors involved and, in particular, the degree to which these writers are directly or indirectly associated with Hizbullah.

For example, the renowned Moroccan writer and scholar 'Abdel Ilah Belkeziz, who is Secretary General of the Moroccan Arab Forum in Rabat, published his *Halat al-Hisar* [The State of the Siege] (2008) with the Dar al-Adab publishing house. Previously employed at the Beirut-based Arab Unity Studies, Belkeziz offers an eyewitness account of the 2006 Israeli attacks on Lebanon as they unfolded day by day. By writing in a semi-journalistic style, Belkeziz not only depicts what he saw as the atrocities committed by the Israeli forces on Lebanon but also the heroic endurance of Hizbullah in resisting these attacks. In Belkeziz's narrative, Hizbullah is militarily undefeatable because it is "a people. [...] you cannot kill a people [...]. Hizbullah is not a group of rejected armed militia. Hizbullah is part of a people and it is the people's social, political and security fence" (2008, p. 65).<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the other most prominent example of a writer whose narratives on Hizbullah and the Islamic Resistance more generally have been given a

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<sup>7</sup> Amongst the different presses, Dar al-Hadi (named after the dead son of Hizbullah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah) is worth singling out here. This publishing house played a key role in the publication of works about the Islamic Resistance in the 1990s and 2000s although it has now closed down.

<sup>8</sup> Belkeziz is quoting and adopting a famous statement by General Michel Aoun – leader of the largest Christian political party in Lebanon, the Free Patriotic Movement – in a television interview with al-Jazeera.

platform by a mainstream publishing house is Fatima Berri Bdeir. Bdeir is a familiar presence on Hizbullah's TV channel *al-Manar* and its radio station *al-Noor* and has been associated with the cultural and social programming of both stations. As part of her job, she has interviewed a wide range of leading secular writers and intellectuals across the Arab world and has published a collection of interviews with renowned cultural figures. Just as we saw in the case of Belkeziz, then, Bdeir is something of a crossover figure with connections to both secular and Islamic cultural circles. This is arguably the main reason why her work has found a publisher and an audience beyond that of other Hizbullah narratives: the secular Arabic Scientific Press. In contrast to those writers whose work is only available in *al-Dhahiyya*, Bdeir's work is bought and sold in bookstores in the heart of cosmopolitan central Beirut, such as Librairie Antoine on Hamra Street.

### **Karbala**

In terms of the context of their publication and distribution, then, Belkeziz and Bdeir's works differ from other Hizbullah narratives, but what they do share with those narratives is a core set of recurring themes. To start with, Hizbullah narratives mobilise a cluster of meanings that speak almost exclusively to a Shi'i reader: the Karbala tragedy. As Kamran Scot Aghaie argues, the Karbala tragedy is the defining symbolic event for Shi'i Muslims. It is the "root metaphor upon which many of their religious belief-systems and rituals are based" (2004, p. 9). For every Hizbullah narrative, the story of the Battle of Karbala – from the martyrdom of the third Shi'i Imam Husayn Ibn 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib, to the capture of the women of Karbala after Imam Husayn's death – plays a pivotal role, but with one significant twist: Karbala is transformed into the story of the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and even Beirut and of the resistance against this occupation. The protagonists of these narratives repeatedly find inspiration in the words and actions of Shi'i role models like Imam Husayn and his sister Lady Zaynab who are commemorated each year in the ten-day Shi'i festival of 'Ashura. In Hizbullah narratives, to borrow the words of a famous 'Ashura chant, it seems that "every day is Karbala" in the south of Lebanon.

To briefly explore the significance of Karbala in Hizbullah narratives, I first want to turn to Rajaa' Muhammad Bitar's *al-Sakhr...Yanbut Zahran* [Rocks...



Grow Flowers] (2004). Bitar's book is a biography of Zahra Shu'ayb, a Lebanese Shi'i who worked with Hizbullah in its formative years and who became an Israeli prisoner. It is clear that the Karbala tragedy plays an instrumental role in Zahra's political activism. She declares that the events of Imam Husayn's martyrdom "fire one's essence with revolution against injustice and oppression in every place and every age" (p. 51). As she issues her call to other women of southern Lebanon to resist the Israeli occupation, she stresses that this mission can only be accomplished by understanding the true meaning of 'Ashura. For Zahra, the women of the south must not merely mourn the Karbala of the past but to live it as an experiential reality in their daily lives (p. 57). Thus, the story of Karbala and its message is evoked at every juncture, even in Zahra's daily interactions with her family and friends. When Zahra and her children try to escape the Israeli shelling of Beirut, the children are forced to spend hours without food and water. In response to their complaints, however, Zahra urges them to "be patient and think...of the hunger of Imam Husayn and his supporters... and their thirst" (p. 30).

Yet, it is not merely the memory of Imam Husayn who provides inspiration for Hizbullah narratives, but that of his sister Lady Zaynab. When the Israeli forces arrest and imprison her, Zahra can only find strength in evoking the legacy of Lady Zaynab whose own imprisonment after the Battle of Karbala becomes the inspiration for Zahra's perseverance in the face of Israeli interrogation and torture. No matter how dire her predicament, Zahra says that "it cannot reach the heights of Zaynab's imprisonment and suffering" (2004, p. 121). This discourse is echoed in the narrative of another female prisoner, Rasmia Jaber, who was also arrested by Israel on charges of aiding Hizbullah. In Fatima Hassan Murad's biography of Jaber, *Asawer Min Hadeed* [Bracelets of Steel] (2005), Rasmia is reported as giving the following reply when another female prisoner asks if she ever feels fear: "Of course I feel afraid but I find solace every time I remember the imprisonment of the mother of tragedies [Zaynab]..." (p. 84).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Both *al-Sakhr...Yanbut Zahrān* and *Asawer Min Hadeed* are published in Dar al-Hadi's 'Resistance Woman Series'.

Finally, 'Adnan al-Hajj's novel, *'Ali Bu 'Ali* [Ali the Father of Ali] (2009) is another Hizbullah narrative that continually invokes the memory and inspiration of Karbala to give meaning to contemporary resistance. Set in the south of Lebanon during the Israeli occupation, al-Hajj depicts Hizbullah's struggle against Israel, as well as against the latter's Lebanese collaborators the Southern Lebanese Army (SLA), as a continuation of the struggle of Imam Husayn and his supporters against the second Umayyad Caliph Yazid (reigned d. 680-83). By this reckoning, the character of Shaykh Abi Reda, the religious leader of the town in which *'Ali Bu 'Ali* is set, serves an important structural function. His 'Ashura commemorations constantly link the events that took place in Karbala to the atrocities taking place in his home- town. In this respect, the Shaykh and the novelist's aims are the same: to provoke everyone – Christians and Muslims - to jihad, whether socially, intellectually or militarily, against an illegal occupying force.

In this respect, al-Hajj's narrative confirms in literature a phenomenon that has already been observed by Lara Deeb (2006) in her anthropological study of the Shi'i community in the southern suburb of Beirut. To Deeb's way of thinking, the Islamic Resistance has politicised commemorations of the Karbala Tragedy in order to "authenticate Ashura" and make it modern among its supporters (pp. 129-131; 149-154). She argues that the meaning of 'Ashura amongst pious Shi'is in Lebanon has gradually become less passively psychological and more actively social and political under the auspices of Hizbullah. From a festival of mourning, 'Ashura has become an opportunity for community work and even revolution (pp. 149-164). Yet, it is possible to argue that this process of "authentication" is already well underway in al-Hajj's novel, as an exchange between 'Ali - a schoolteacher who works undercover for the Resistance - and Shaykh Abi Reda prior to a 'Ashura commemoration testifies. For 'Ali, it is not enough that 'Ashura should simply be another traditional festival of weeping, mourning and even self-flagellation:

I suggest that you make this occasion a time to discuss the meaning of jihad and to propel people of all religions to struggle in their capacity [...] against the occupation, rather than a time for people to weep over the past, to beat their chests and to flagellate their heads. (2009, p. 12)

If the trope of Karbala is largely employed to address a reader whose relationship to this historical event is part of the very fabric of their faith, it is worth adding before we move on that it also appears in narratives by non-Muslim (Christian, secular or atheist) writers. In Moroccan Belkeziz's account, for example, the "cycle of Karbala is completed" with the Israeli attacks on Lebanon: "the sons of 'Ali and Husayn will stand against you at every point" he threatens the Israeli forces (2008, p. 141).

### **Zionism, Judaism, Anti-Semitism**

In many ways, the single most controversial aspect of Hizbullah narratives is their representation of Zionism and Judaism. It is now almost taken as given in western popular discourse on Hizbullah that it is an anti-Semitic party, dedicated not merely to the total destruction of Israel but of the Jewish people itself. At the same time, of course, there can be no doubt that such discourse is itself part of a self-conscious political strategy (particularly in the USA) to stigmatise Hizbullah as a terrorist organisation pure and simple, to paint its resistance to Israel as driven by an irrational racial or religious hatred and thus to render impossible any prospect of dialogue or compromise with it. If Hizbullah itself rejects all charges of anti-Semitism, however, and many of the charges themselves are politically driven, they cannot be dismissed as simply western propaganda. In her detailed analysis of the issue from a broadly Hizbullah-sympathetic perspective, for example, Amal-Saad Ghorayeb admits that "differentiation between the party's anti-Zionism and anti-Judaism [is hard] to establish" in the context of a 30-year war against Israel (2002, p.171).

To be sure, Hizbullah leaders do differentiate between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in their public utterances and their policy statements consistently praise Judaism as a "divine religion" that is part of the same Abrahamic tradition as Islam. They also seek to differentiate between "ordinary Jews", on the one hand, and "Zionist Jews", on the other, who have transformed their "religious beliefs" into "political products" that has resulted in the formation of their own state "at the expense of others" (2002, p. 168). According to Saad-Ghorayeb, the party has repeatedly emphasised that it has no problem with the "original Jewish

inhabitants of Palestine, but only with those who emigrated there after 1948” (2002, p. 168). Yet, she goes on to observe that “the Zionist state has had an impact on Hizbullah’s perception of the Jews” more generally (p. 171) and it is true that certain public utterances by Hizbullah officials do appear to use the terms “Jewish” and “Zionist” almost interchangeably. For Saad-Ghorayeb, there is also a strain in Hizbullah discourse which, still more problematically, erases the Zionist/Judaism opposition altogether by stressing that the roots of the Zionist expansionary project lay within the history and theology of Judaism itself (2002, p. 169-170). In this sense, Hizbullah allies itself with a classic Islamic and Qur’anic anti-Judaism that sees the Jewish people as aggressive, untrustworthy and conspiratorial (2002, p. 171).

What happens, then, when Hizbullah narratives try to represent Judaism? To start with, it is important to stress that (like their political counterparts) Hizbullah narratives like De Gaulle Abu Tass’ *Bila Qayd* [Without Shackles] (2002), *Asawer Min Hadeed* [Bracelets of Steel] (2005) and Muhammad ‘Ali al-Hadi’s *al-Busta* [The Bus] (2008) repeatedly seek to differentiate between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism – even to the point of mobilising Judaism itself to mount an ethical and political critique of Zionism. It is only necessary to return to Murad’s *Asawer Min Hadeed* to see what we might call this ‘Jewish anti-Zionism’ at work. As Murad recounts, Rasmia’s story largely takes place in the southern Lebanese village Mhaybeb (Arabic for ‘the beloved’ or ‘dear’ one) whose name refers to a local religious shrine. The shrine is dedicated to Benjamin (Binyamin), youngest son of the Prophet Jacob, who is called ‘Mhyabeb’ in Arabic as a tribute to the special love his father held for him. However, Rasmia audaciously enlists the Jewish prophet Jacob himself into her struggle against Zionism: Murad narrates how Rasmia visited the shrine to pray to God to protect her village from the Israeli occupation (2005, p. 27). When the other villagers are unable to visit the shrine because of Israeli encirclement, they send written prayers to be left at it through third parties (p. 20). If anyone is unable to accept the difference between anti-Zionism and anti-Judaism in this text, it is ironically the Israeli army itself and their Lebanese collaborators the southern Lebanese Army. They refuse to believe that Rasmia would pray at the shrine of a “Jewish prophet” or even send a letter of prayer to him (p. 20). For

Rasmia, the Prophet Mhaybab/Benyamin continues to be a source of veneration during her arrest, interrogation and torture: she prays to him to help the Resistance against the “rigid [and] fanatical” Israeli forces (p. 20). In fact, she observes, the Shrine to the Jewish prophet has become the sole witness to the massacres committed by the Israeli occupiers (p. 28).

In Hizbullah narratives, though, it is also possible to detect something of the same ambiguity towards Judaism that we identified in the Party’s political statements. On the one hand, they are at pains to stress that anti-Zionism is not to be confused with anti-Judaism. On the other, they do occasionally tend to collapse representations of Zionists and Jews into one interchangeable mass. Yet, this is not to say that the texts themselves fall victim to a simple anti-Semitism because it is often necessary to distinguish between views expressed by characters and the narratives more generally. To take *al-Busta* (2008) as an example here, we can observe a clear difference between the voice of the omniscient third person narrator of the text and the interior consciousness and external dialogue of the lives and characters he narrates. They – the people of southern Lebanon experiencing Israeli occupation on a daily basis – are shown to be quite unable to distinguish between Zionism and Judaism and thus frequently attribute Israeli expansionism to a more general Jewish aggression. When the text returns to the third person narrator, however, the narrator is careful to re-establish the Jewish/Zionist opposition by stressing that Hizbullah’s war is not against Judaism in general. In this sense, *al-Busta* is less an anti-Semitic text than a dramatization of how political anti-Zionism can potentially leak into anti-Semitism in the context of war.

### **Lebanonisation and Pan-Arabism**

Finally, I want to turn to another recurrent theme or trope in Hizbullah narratives: its *infitah* or ‘opening up’ not only to Lebanese nationalism political but to the larger pan-Arab nationalisation project. From its origins as a Shi’i resistance movement in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion in 1982, Hizbullah today (either genuinely or more pragmatically) embraces the political system and institutions of Lebanon to the point of participating in the recent March 8<sup>th</sup> coalition government. Perhaps more remarkably still, the Party has also begun to

attract support throughout the Arab world beyond its core Shi'i constituency: Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah was widely hailed in the region as a latterday Jamal Abdul Nasser in the aftermath of the July 2006 war against Israel. To what extent can the *infatih* of Hizbullah also be witnessed in Hizbullah narratives?

It is only necessary to compare narratives written during, or representing, different periods of the Party's development, to see how far Hizbullah's literature has evolved over its 30-year history. To begin with, Hawraa' Ragheb Harb's *Haneen Ila Shams Abi* [Longing for my Father's Sun] (2009) and *Asawer Min Hadeed* seek to capture the Party in its nascent years. The exemplary achievements of the Islamic Revolution in Iran are highlighted while the Ayatollah Khomeini is portrayed as a role model and father figure to both the resistance fighters and to their supporters in Lebanon. In *Asawer Min Hadeed*, for instance, the protagonist Rasmia responds to those who dub Hizbullah "an Iranian party" by retorting: "So let it [Hizbullah] be an extension [of the Iranian Revolution] and a bridge where the authentic message can pass" (2005, p. 42).

At the same time, *Haneen Ila Shams Abi* – a memoir written by the daughter of one of the founding members of Hizbullah, Shaykh Ragheb Harb<sup>10</sup> – continually invokes the Party's Iranian origins. It is revealing that the image of Imam Khomeini symbolically resides in the centre of Shaykh Harb's house and stimulates the children's imaginations. When Shaykh Harb returns from a trip to Iran, his children want to know "if the Imam looks exactly like the picture" in their house, and whether their father "sat next to the Imam," "what the Imam said?" and "what the Imam's house was like?" In response, Shaykh Harb tells his children that the toys he has brought back with him "are gifts from the Imam" (2009, p. 19).

Yet, the representation of the Iranian Revolution and Khomeini recede dramatically in Hizbullah narratives of a later period: what emerges is an explicit attempt to render the Party a purely Lebanese resistance movement with no loyalty to any power except the Lebanese people. To return to *'Ali Bu 'Ali* (2009),

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<sup>10</sup> Shaykh Ragheb Harb is one of the key figures in the early history of Hizbullah. He led resistance against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in 1982 until his assassination in 1984.

for example, the Islamic Resistance is clearly depicted as existing for, and depending upon, both Christians and Muslims in Lebanon (p. 25). By the same token, the novel significantly depicts Christian characters as aiding the Resistance at every point. When a resistance fighter is wounded and chased by Israeli forces, it is Umm Hanna, an elderly Christian woman, who offers him shelter and summons the physician for him – even refusing to report the patient's whereabouts to Lebanese collaborators with Israel. In assisting the resistance fighter, both Umm Hanna and the Christian physician specifically state that this is “part of their contribution in the ongoing national resistance” (2009, pp. 97-98).

To return to al-Hadi's *al-Busta* (2008), it is again striking to note that the novel offers a direct parallel between the lives of a Christian and a Muslim family to show that the atrocities of the occupation spared no sect. This comparison again transforms the Resistance from a purely Islamic movement into a national one, struggling for the sake of the whole of Lebanon. For example, we see that the tragedies that befall Hajj Abu 'Ali's family are mirrored and re-enacted in the family of his closest friend Abu Hanna. Both incur severe damage to their land and property at the hands of the Israeli forces. Both suffer from a shortage of basic resources: food, water, electricity. And both lose a close member of their respective families: Abu Muhammad loses his son-in-law and Abu Hanna his son. In the words of one Muslim character, 'Ali, speaking to his Christian friend Michele: “I used to think that those who lived in East Beirut [the Christian sector of the capital] led a more civilised life, but I discovered that the soles of both of our feet are being thrashed” (2008, p. 63).

By the same logic, the vast majority of female prison narratives transform religious difference into unity through an emphasis upon the common predicament of all imprisoned Lebanese women, Christian or Muslim. Whether a woman was supporting the Party of God or the Communist Party or the Palestinian Liberation Front, she was still tortured endlessly. During their confinement, the female prisoners transcend their religious differences and establish a dialogue on the basis of their shared national identity. In this sense, the prison ironically becomes a metaphor for the Lebanese nation more

generally overcoming its differences in the face of a common enemy and oppressor.

Perhaps the most fascinating example of the Lebanonisation of Hizbullah, however, is found in De Gaulle Abu Tass's' memoir *Bila Qayd* (2002). Written by a Christian Maronite Hizbullah member, Tass's autobiography recounts the story of how he joined Hizbullah in the 1990s and became a resistance fighter. De Gaulle recalls that his grandfather named him after the French General Charles De Gaulle, who visited their village in the south of Lebanon during the Second World War. Like the French General whose name he carries, the Lebanese De Gaulle will become enmeshed in a resistance movement – not for the sake of any particular sect – but for his country as a whole. To begin with, De Gaulle is drawn to secular resistance parties in the country such as the Lebanese National Resistance. Yet, as these parties become enmeshed in internal strife and lose their support base (p. 134), De Gaulle is drawn into the Party of God. For De Gaulle, Hizbullah is no longer merely an Islamic resistance movement but a truly national one:

I am honoured to be a member of Hizbullah and, as a Christian, I am proud to be part of the Islamic resistance in a nation whose land is the property of everyone... for the difference in religious belonging is not reason for separation ... the nation belongs to everyone. (p. 143)

If the Israeli forces he encounters cannot believe that a Christian Maronite would be part of a secular resistance group, let alone an Islamic one, De Gaulle reflects that he has found his “natural place” among Hizbullah because they, unlike the other Lebanese militias, had not been “smeared with the blood” of the Civil War:

They [Hizbullah] [...] turned their face outwards towards an enemy who was responsible for our suffering and misery...[this enemy] has occupied a land that both Christians and Muslims inhabit [...] and for this reason we should be proud of Hizbullah and should embrace and follow in its footsteps. (p. 140)

Finally, then, we can see that De Gaulle's narrative confirms what Joseph Alagha (2006) in his larger study on Hizbullah's shifting ideology calls the party's “*infatah* trend”: “dialogue, tolerance and acceptance of the other” (p. 159). This trend, as De Gaulle's narratives reveals, was rigorously implemented even in the



Party's internal communication: "The brothers in Hizbullah were very careful to stress through policy and practice that what united us was much more important than the difference that the enemy had tried to plant amongst people of the same nation and the same fate" (2002, p. 141). In this sense, De Gaulle becomes the personal embodiment of *infītah*: "the Christian who found in Islam all the meanings of lived goodness stressed in Christianity and they [the other Hizbullah members] were the Muslims who found in my Christianity all that Islam transmits about goodness, love and justice" (2002, p. 139).

If Hizbullah narratives reflect the increasing Lebanonisation of the Party, though, they also dramatise its attempts to move beyond the limits of the nation state and speak to a larger pan-Arab audience. It is possible to witness this in the way that Hizbullah literature (like the political leadership of the Party) mobilises pan-Arab concerns like Palestine as a means of gaining wider regional support. During all the narratives under analysis, it is the tragedy of Palestine that gives rise to the resistance in Lebanon, especially in the south: Palestinian uprisings in the occupied territories are shown to inspire resistance activities in Lebanon. To demonstrate this, we need only observe that a number of the resistance memoirs under discussion here predate the formation of Hizbullah: they depict the activities of the Palestinian Liberation Front in Lebanon. Such efforts against the Israeli occupation of Palestine are later transposed into resisting the Israeli occupation of Lebanon itself through the establishment of Hizbullah. For Rasmia Jaber, to take just one example, support for Hizbullah in southern Lebanon is driven not only by a wish to liberate her town but by a nostalgia for Palestine: the Palestinian uprisings are even said to send "a kiss of jihad" in her direction (2005, p. 18). By the same token, De Gaulle's narrative recalls how sheltering Palestinian *Fida'iyeen* (resistance fighters) in his childhood home instilled an early consciousness of resistance (2002, p. 29). In Zahra Shu'ayb's narrative (2004), the memory of Palestinians fleeing from their homes in 1948 is brought back to life as she and her father and children struggle to flee the Israeli shelling of Beirut.

In many ways, Hizbullah's pan-Arab support arguably reached its apogee following the 2006 Israeli attacks on Lebanon and the respect that the Party of God garnered on the Arab 'Street' following the attacks is also depicted and

exploited in Hizbullah narratives.<sup>11</sup> To conclude this discussion with one particularly powerful signifier of this globalisation of the resistance, Belkeziz's eyewitness account of the 2006 War declares that Hizbullah and Abu-Hadi (Hassan Nasrallah) "embody the whole [Arab] umma" and even "revive its sense of pride and self-confidence" (2008, p. 259-260). It is no coincidence here that Belkeziz compares Nasrallah to the last great hero of pan-Arabism Jamal Abdul Nasser: what "Abdul Nasser began, Nasrallah is continuing" (p. 115). At the same time, Belkeziz also insists that Hizbullah's significance is not confined to the Arab world because the Party belong to a general and globalised anti-colonial resistance movement: "Nasrallah is a historical hero [...] Leftists, nationalists, democrats and liberals wished he was one of them" (p. 261). Even Hugo Chavez, left-wing President of Venezuela, becomes "an Arab in his stance if not in blood" because of his stance against the 2006 aggression on Lebanon (p. 160). Perhaps the extent to which Hizbullah succeeded in attaining pan-Arab and global support is most subtly but powerfully reflected in Belkeziz's use of the first person plural when addressing the Israeli forces:

Oh Nazi killers. Come forward if you still have an ounce of courage. The resistance is waiting for you [...] so *we* can teach you what you didn't learn in all your wars with Arabs. (p. 174, stress mine)

In his rhetorical use of the "we" to refer to Hizbullah, Belkeziz performs the very transformation in Hizbullah's identity we described at the beginning of this paper: the Party of God is no longer merely a Lebanese Shi'i resistance movement, in his account, but nothing less than the voice and spirit of pan-Arab unity and global resistance everywhere. For Belkeziz, as for so many other narrators of the party of God, it seems that 'we are all Hizbullah now'.

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<sup>11</sup> In recent years, this support has undoubtedly declined due to Hizbullah's self-interested response to the events of the Arab Spring: the Party called for the downfall of the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain but continues to support its Syrian patron Bashar al-Assad and call for 'dialogue' between the government and the opposition.

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